

To the Members of the California State Assembly:

I am returning Assembly Bill 1324 without my signature.

This bill seeks to address the tragic circumstances of one state employee by amending the entire workers' compensation system in an unprecedented manner. This bill would extend workers' compensation benefits to the dependents of specified public safety employees if the dependent suffered health problems as a direct result of their parent or spouse's workers' compensation injury. The workers' compensation system is intended to compensate employees for injuries arising out of and occurring in the course of employment. Extending those benefits to dependents of employees, even in the narrow manner proposed in this bill, is beyond the constitutional requirement of the workers' compensation system.

Earlier this year, I signed Senate Bill 899, a major overhaul of the workers' compensation system. My Administration is in the process of implementing the necessary regulations to improve the system. The reforms were negotiated in a bi-partisan fashion and are intended to return fundamental fairness to a system that was spiraling out of control. The reforms are intended to refocus the workers' compensation system on medical outcomes rather than litigation. This measure expands the scope and intent of the workers' compensation system disturbing the delicate balance sought by this year's reform efforts.

I am mindful that the daughter of one of our public servants contracted an illness simply because her mother faced an occupational hazard. However, this bill establishes a dangerous precedent by expanding workers' compensation benefits to non-employees as an alternative for health care coverage.

For these reasons I am unable to support this measure.

Sincerely,

Arnold Schwarzenegger